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SUBJECT: MFA LEGAL ADVISER HANS WINKLER BECOMES AUSTRIA'S NEW STATE SECRETARY FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

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1.(SBU) On July 4, Hans Winkler, heretofore the Austrian Foreign Ministry's Legal Advisor and number three official, became new State Secretary in the MFA. European Affairs will be the core portfolio for this new position. Winkler, who is not affiliated with any political party, is a top diplomat and will be a key asset for the GOA in carrying out the EU Presidency in the first half of 2006.

2.(U) Some opposition politicians criticized the appointment of an additional State Secretary. The government of Wolfgang Schussel had resisted for years creating the position for fear of seeming to expand the government. However, the opposition Greens welcomed Winkler's nomination as a necessary step for the EU Presidency. Winkler stressed that he will not receive any additional staff, but will head over 100 MFA personnel in charge of preparing for and carrying out the EU Presidency. With the creation of a State Secretary to handle EU affairs, the GOA follows the practice of several other EU countries. During its last EU Presidency in 1998, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, who is now EU Commissioner, was Austria's State Secretary for European Affairs.

3.(U) The Foreign Ministry has not yet announced who will assume charge of the legal office. Christian Ebner, Winkler's deputy, will move to Winkler's state secretariat. However, Winkler and Ebner will remain

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engaged on Holocaust restitution issues.

Bio

4.(U) 60-year old Winkler was born in Vienna. After obtaining a law degree from the University of Vienna, he attended the Diplomatic Academy and then, in 1970, joined the MFA. His foreign assignments included West Berlin, Strassbourg, Belgrade, Cairo and Washington. He served as Director (Assistant Secretary equivalent) of the Americas Desk in Vienna from 1996 to 1999. He became Legal Adviser in 1999, and was key negotiator in the Holocaust restitution negotiations in 2000 and 2001. Since 2002, he has also served as deputy MFA Secretary General effectively the third-ranking official in the MFA. He is married to Christa Winkler. They have a daughter.

Comment

5.(SBU) The assignment of Winkler is an important step toward a successful Austrian EU Presidency in 2006. Winkler has been a key adviser to Chancellor Schuessel and Foreign Minister Plassnik. He has been an excellent, cooperative and flexible interlocutor for the USG. Both government and opposition parties value him highly as top diplomat and legal expert. With his extroverted and warmhearted personality, Winkler is popular throughout the Austrian political class.

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